

## **NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL AND EUROPEAN STRATEGY TO COMBAT THE DEADLY WEAPONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Nuclear weapons are the most dangerous and potent weapons on earth and has the capacity to destroy a whole city, potentially killing millions, and jeopardizing the natural environment and lives of future generations through its long-term catastrophic effects. Nuclear Arms control is a term for international restrictions upon the development, production, stockpiling, proliferation and usage of small arms, conventional weapons, and weapons of mass destruction.

### **KEY WORDS**

Arms, Development, European Union, Proliferation

### **OBJECTIVES**

This Paper analyzes the

1. The nuclear weapons and its potentiality
2. Nuclear arms control and strategy
3. Response of Europe to nuclear weapons

### **INTRODUCTION**

The system of nuclear arms control, which originated during the cold war as a United States–Soviet Endeavour, is in crisis. The European Union (EU) member states and the EU itself have already been negatively affected, but thus far European actors have remained observers rather than active players. The EU has not prioritized nuclear arms control as part of its agenda and remains ill-suited as an institutional actor to engage on this topic. Instead of focusing on praising the past achievements of nuclear arms control and lamenting its demise, the EU and its member states should review the situation and analyze the options. Must they continue to play second fiddle to the two nuclear superpowers? Or are there ways in which the EU can take a more proactive stance in addressing the major nuclear security threats and challenges facing Europe and influencing the nuclear arms

control agenda? This paper examines the legacy of nuclear arms control, recent developments and the causes of the crisis; and analyses their impact on European security. Finally, it presents options on how the EU and its member states can become engaged in rethinking the nuclear arms control architecture.

## **NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO EUROPEAN SECURITY**

Even though various forms of arms control can be traced through the ages, such as the establishment of restraints on the development of armaments by a defeated party following a conflict, its conceptual development in the 20th century was closely connected with the advent of nuclear weapons and the subsequent cold war confrontation between the USA and the Soviet Union. Faced with the threat of a devastating nuclear exchange and the increasing financial costs of the nuclear arms race, and with the Cuban missile crisis providing a warning of the dangers of a nuclear escalation, both countries decided jointly to manage this aspect of their adversarial relationship rather than risk unconstrained competition or catastrophic war. In their 1961 book *Strategy and Arms Control*, Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin define arms control as ‘all the forms of military cooperation between potential enemies in the interest of reducing the likelihood of war, its scope and violence if it occurs, and the political and economic costs of being prepared for it’. This definition captures neatly the nature of cold war bilateral arms control efforts. The aim was to make the ongoing confrontation less dangerous and more stable. This could be achieved by providing a degree of predictability, transparency and restraint regarding the development of each side’s strategic forces and reducing the likelihood of one side aiming at or achieving a qualitative or quantitative breakthrough in armaments, which would inevitably cause the other side to react (arms race stability). The arms control system was also intended to reduce the incentives for launching a surprise strike or escalating to the nuclear level during a crisis (crisis stability). Arms control thus differed from the disarmament-focused approach and was pursued in parallel with non-proliferation efforts. The resulting strategic stability-focused approach resulted in a series of arms control negotiations and treaties focused on ‘narrow, technical constraints on military capabilities or behaviour that potential adversaries [could] devise to reduce the risks and costs of competition’. This was the essence of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), launched in the late 1960s, which led to, among other things, the SALT 1 agreement, the

Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the SALT 2 agreement. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, these were followed by the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START 1) and the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs). It is notable that strategic stability logic continued to be applied even after the end of the cold war, when the relationship between the USA and Russia was supposedly founded on the basis of common values and interests. It underpinned work on the START 2 and START 3 treaties and the most recent bilateral agreements—the Moscow Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) and the New START.<sup>4</sup> This sequence of agreements first stabilized the confrontation between the two superpowers, then supported the peaceful transformation of East–West relations at the end of the cold war (the INF Treaty and the PNIs), before finally enabling significant reductions in the number of warheads and delivery vehicles (START 1 and New START). The history of arms control throughout the cold war involved periods of stagnation, periods of escalation and periods of crisis, such as the Soviet deployment of SS-20 intermediate-range missiles in Europe or US President Ronald Reagan's pursuit of a new generation of nuclear armaments and the Strategic Defence Initiative (territorial missile defence). Various approaches to arms control were pursued at different points by both the US and the Soviet/Russian leaderships. The role of nuclear arms control in ending the cold war may have been overestimated, as it served mainly to optimize the nuclear forces of the two countries for their nuclear missions rather than reduce stockpiles. Overall, however, the positive contribution of arms control to the prevention of nuclear war and to the management of US–Soviet and US–Russian relations is incontestable. Although European states did not participate directly in the bilateral nuclear arms control negotiations, the European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were kept informed by the USA and consulted—bilaterally and within the NATO framework—on the major nuclear arms control initiatives and talks with the Soviet Union, and later with Russia. In the case of the 'Euro missiles' crisis and subsequent INF Treaty negotiations, consultations within NATO, with the active participation of European NATO members, were essential for the formulation of both the deterrence track (through the work of the Nuclear Planning Group and the High Level Group) and the arms control track (through the newly established Special Consultative Group) of the Double-Track' decision adopted by NATO in November 1979. Developments in nuclear arms control between the two superpowers

affected Europe in a number of ways. Most fundamentally, during the cold war all European states—regardless of their ideological affiliation or status as neutrals, or members of NATO or the Warsaw Pact—faced a direct threat to their survival in the event of a nuclear exchange between the USA and the Soviet Union, which it was understood would involve sooner or later a massive use of nuclear weapons in Europe. They were therefore interested in and generally supportive of strategic dialogue between the two superpowers and in advances in arms control. From their viewpoint, the security of Europe benefited from a gradual reduction in the two nuclear arsenals and the increased predictability guaranteed by strategic arms control treaties. Progress in bilateral arms control also supported nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament goals. However, some European states at times also expressed reservations about the consequences of the superpowers' pursuit of strategic nuclear arms control. First, the focus on the systems capable of striking targets on US and Russian territory meant that other categories of nuclear weapons, with a crucial security impact on Europe, remained unconstrained. These 'non-strategic' or tactical weapons, deployed on a large scale by NATO and the Soviet Union/Warsaw Pact in Europe for war-fighting purposes, were capable of causing catastrophic levels of damage in case of war. Concern about the consequences of a limited nuclear war in Europe provided an incentive for the rise of European peace movements and also brought proposals from both sides of the Iron Curtain on the creation of nuclear weapon-free zones in Europe. Second, there were concerns expressed at times in some NATO countries about arms control going too far and the USA disregarding the interests of its European allies by agreeing to arms control proposals that would lead to a strategic decoupling from Europe. It was also feared that the USA could become so focused on the relaxation of tensions with the Soviet Union/Russia that it would not react to assertive actions in Europe. This explains, for example, the insistence of Germany and a number of other NATO members in the late 1970s that the USA include the new Soviet intermediate range systems in its arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union, even though they could not directly threaten the USA. Similar concerns were expressed about disregarding the interests of European NATO members, especially by Central and East European states, during President Barack Obama's 'reset' with Russia and negotiations over New START. Finally, both during and after the cold war the European nuclear weapon states—France and the United Kingdom—emphasized the independent character of their nuclear arsenals

and their opposition to having them included in strategic arms control negotiations and treaties. The long-standing Soviet and Russian argument has been that they should essentially be treated as part of the 'Western' nuclear arsenal, and should ultimately be counted within one set of thresholds on numbers of delivery systems and warheads. In response, France and the UK maintain that they have already substantially and unilaterally reduced the number and salience of nuclear weapons in their own postures since the end of the cold war. It may be assumed that they would be willing to consider joining a nuclear arms control negotiation only after the two biggest possessors have significantly reduced their stockpiles. This duality of general European support for nuclear arms control, on the one hand, and concerns about whether the focus and substance of bilateral US–Russian nuclear arms control are fully in sync with European security interests, on the other, remains relevant today.

### **THE CURRENT STATE OF THE NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL ARCHITECTURE**

The 2010 New START between the USA and Russia remains in force. The agreement sets equal limits on strategic delivery systems: 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), sea launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and heavy bombers, 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers and heavy bombers, as well as a limit of 1550 warheads on deployed strategic delivery vehicles. It also includes an extensive information-exchange and verification system involving onsite inspections. This gives both sides detailed insight into each other's strategic nuclear forces and a high degree of predictability regarding their future development. The treaty does not put additional constraints on the development of new kinds of strategic offensive weapons, but allows each side to raise the issue of their emergence and the consequences for the treaty in the consultative process. New START was signed in Prague on 8 April 2010 and entered into force on 5 February 2011. Russia had previously demanded that the USA address what it called its implementation concerns—issues connected with the conversion of US heavy bombers and the ballistic missile compartments of submarines to nonnuclear roles. In the USA, a review was initiated by the administration of Donald J. Trump to determine whether a New START extension is in the interests of the USA. While some in the US Government and Congress strongly support prolongation, highlighting its positive effects, critics point out that it covers only a proportion of the Russian arsenal (i.e. it does not place

limits on tactical nuclear weapons, which make up a large part of the Russian arsenal), and constrains the USA much more than it does Russia. The USA has also suggested the possibility of substituting the system of bilateral agreements with a trilateral US–Russian–Chinese arms control treaty, an idea pursued by the Trump administration despite its initial rejection by China. While the New START remains in force until 2021, the INF Treaty will expire in August 2019. The 1987 agreement resulted in the complete elimination of US and Soviet/Russian nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5500 kilometres. The treaty collapsed after Russia failed to adequately address US accusations that its SSC-8/9M729 cruise missile was being developed and deployed in violation of the treaty. Following the US and NATO determination that Russia was in breach of the INF Treaty, At the same time, however, all sides signaled restraint in terms of the development of missiles. The USA declared that it had no plans to develop nuclear intermediate-range ground-based missiles, while the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, announced that NATO had no plans to deploy such nuclear-armed missiles in Europe. In Russia, President Putin declared that Russia would not deploy intermediate range missiles unless the USA did so, while failing to include in his pledge the SSC-8/9M729 missile that was at the heart of the controversy. The non-treaty-based instruments make up the last element of the arms control framework relevant to Europe. The PNIs were a number of commitments announced in 1991 and 1992 by the then US president, George H. W. Bush, the then Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the then president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin. They focused on the reduction or elimination of certain categories of non-strategic nuclear weapons and their means of delivery. Not legally binding and non-verifiable, these initiatives nonetheless resulted in the withdrawal of substantial numbers of warheads and nuclear delivery systems from European territory, and the consolidation of the remaining non-strategic warheads at a limited number of storage sites. They also paved the way for the elimination of all British and French non-strategic nuclear weapons. The current relevance of and adherence (particularly by Russia) to the PNIs are contested. Another example of politically binding restraint is the NATO December 1996 statement of ‘no intention, no plan and no reason’ to deploy nuclear weapons or construct storage sites on the territories of the newly admitted member states, confirmed in the NATO–Russia Founding Act of 1997.

## **CAUSES OF THE NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL CRISIS**

Developments in bilateral nuclear arms control do not take place in isolation from broader international developments. The breakdown of the arms control system is part of a crisis in the relationship between Russia and the West, which is itself related to an ongoing shift in the post-cold war international order linked primarily to the increase in the strategic importance of China. What is described as an arms control crisis has also been partly a predictable consequence of the application of emerging technologies, such as cyber tools or hypersonic technologies, to the military domain, as well as of nuclear modernization processes. While affected by the heightened sense of a security dilemma, some of the nuclear developments in the USA, Russia and China would be happening anyway, regardless of the state of arms control. This is also applicable to the exploration by nuclear-armed states of the strategic uses of high-precision conventional weapons, of autonomous systems and of artificial intelligence (AI). Three dimensions appear especially relevant to the arms control crisis. In the political sphere, an appreciation of the utility of arms control and its role in managing strategic competition between powers has been gradually declining since the mid-1990s. Arms control was no longer central to the relationship between the USA and Russia and was not relevant to other relationships, such as the USA–China relationship. When divergences between the major powers started to accumulate, primacy was given to strengthening deterrence rather than restraint. Nuclear weapons were seen as an increasingly important element of maintaining the security of the possessors and of extended deterrence relationships. Specific policy choices, such as Russia's decision to challenge the European security system through its attack on Ukraine and to violate a number of arms control agreements, also played a major role. There have also been structural reasons for the crisis. The most important one was the deep attachment in the USA and Russia to an arms control concept developed essentially in the 1960s and 1970s for the purpose of maintaining US–Soviet strategic stability. Within this construct, there were no easy options for broadening it to include more actors or reconstructing it to cover more areas. The bilateral arms control construct also meant that no suitable forum existed for multilateral negotiations on arms control between all the nuclear-armed states. The last, and perhaps the most crucial, aspect of the nuclear arms control crisis is linked to the advance of technology and new modes of waging warfare. In the past, Soviet and US arms

controllers managed to adjust the agenda of their talks to changes in technology, such as the development of multiple independently targeted warheads or of 'semi-strategic' intermediate-range systems capable of reaching Soviet or US territory (e.g. the Pershing or the Tu-22 Backfire)

### **FUTURE SCENARIO**

Even if a new approach to assuring strategic stability at the bilateral, trilateral or multilateral level is ultimately developed, it is not certain that nuclear arms control treaties will be an important element of it. In addition, the opportunities for European states to make a significant contribution to its functioning would vary greatly, depending on the direction in which the arms control system is developed. The first scenario is continuation. Prolongation of New START beyond 2021 cannot be ruled out. It could potentially be done as a political gesture before or after the US presidential elections or as a stop-gap measure while the two sides prepare for the negotiation of the next bilateral treaty, covering essentially the same range of systems. One potential outline for such a treaty was proposed by President Obama in Berlin in 2013. This arrangement would mean agreeing a one-third lower threshold for nuclear warheads and probably a lower level for strategic delivery vehicles too. The second scenario would be to look into broadening the scope of a legally binding bilateral treaty and/or at making it trilateral. More far-reaching proposals for a 'New START Plus' include agreeing a single nuclear warheads threshold for strategic and non-strategic systems, or including some of the new types of nuclear and conventional precision-strike systems in a new treaty, alongside limits on strategic missile defence. The Trump administration's approach goes even further to 'try to bring China into a trilateral arms control discussion'. The third scenario is one in which a treaty-based arms control framework ceases to exist as a permanent fixture of international relations. In addition, China's position does not change, making the prospects for negotiating a trilateral treaty bleak. Such a scenario would not necessarily open the floodgates for an unconstrained arms race. The USA and Russia would probably initially maintain their current postures and China is unlikely to race for parity. All three would also continue to be bound by their 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Non-Proliferation Treaty, NPT) Article VI disarmament obligations. For political, strategic and financial reasons, major additional investments in increasing their nuclear potential may not be an attractive option for either the USA or Russia. The problems of a world without nuclear arms control

treaties would only accumulate over time, however, as security dilemma pressures are likely to intensify under conditions of 'great power competition'. Freedom of action in the nuclear weapons realm could push the USA or Russia to develop and deploy new configurations of nuclear and conventional systems. In addition, one side's defensive measures (such as an advance in missile defence systems) could be seen by the other side and third countries as destabilizing and force them to take countermeasures in the nuclear sphere. The likely decrease in the scale and intensity of interactions between the bureaucracies, militaries and intelligence communities could also increase mistrust and give rise to worst-case scenarios regarding the other side's posture and one's own vulnerability to surprise attack.

The main challenge with the 'new generation' of strategic arms control—beyond the multiplication of actors—would be the joint identification of the set of capabilities that would have to be included in order to achieve strategic stability. The designation of particular systems as 'strategic' can vary from region to region and from actor to actor. Regional approaches to strategic stability would probably need to be developed. It may not be possible to agree verifiable limitations on some of the potentially destabilizing elements, such as the use of cyber capabilities or AI, due either to the nature of the capabilities or the desire of states to protect their advantage.

### **IMPACT ON EUROPEAN SECURITY**

Europe has benefited from the existence of the INF Treaty and New START, and the maintenance of bilateral US–Russian dialogue on strategic stability and arms control. The collapse of the INF Treaty, war in Ukraine, and the crisis in US–Russian and NATO–Russian relations revive the threat that the European continent will become a deployment zone for additional Russian and potentially US nuclear-capable weapon systems. Beyond the military domain, the crisis also generates a number of political and strategic challenges for the European nuclear weapon states, for the European NATO member states and for the EU. For the European nuclear powers—France and the UK—the US–Russian arms control framework has created a predictable strategic environment for maintaining their own nuclear posture and planning the development of their nuclear forces. Most importantly, it made unlikely a scenario involving a rapid increase in Russian nuclear forces, which would have raised doubts about the credibility and sufficiency of their deterrents. The existence of a bilateral US–Russian nuclear arms control process also limited the pressure on the two

European states to join the negotiations and further reduce their own arsenals. The crisis in bilateral arms control will most likely force both countries to re-evaluate their own approaches to both deterrence and arms control. For the European NATO member states, the demise of the INF Treaty and potential non-prolongation of New START brings another set of challenges. In military terms, Russian freedom to produce and deploy land-based nuclear-capable intermediate-range systems increases the threat for NATO member states located further from the NATO–Russian border zone, since they could be targeted in the event of a conflict with Russia. Without the INF Treaty, it is also more likely that additional European countries, for example Ukraine, will move to develop intermediate range missiles. Even though these missiles would be conventionally armed, their deployment would increase security risks in Europe. In the NATO context, European NATO member states will need to take a stance on their response to any Russian missile deployments. This could involve both a strengthening of deterrence, including the nuclear aspects, and the development of a new approach to arms control. All European states and the EU have remained supportive of US–Russian arms control as part of their vision of a rules-based global order, and as a measure through which ‘power politics’ are constrained and multilateralism strengthened. The position of the EU and its member states in international organizations and in the NPT review process has consistently included support for further nuclear reductions by the USA and Russia. It had been assumed that such an environment of ongoing reductions would provide optimal conditions for strengthening the peace and security of Europe. This ‘outsourcing’ of nuclear arms control to Russia and the USA also allowed the EU to focus its efforts on preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, especially through its engagement with Iran, and strengthening regimes such as the NPT and the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. The crisis in bilateral arms control—coupled with other setbacks for multilateralism—may force member states to re-examine their approach at the EU level. They must decide on the extent to which they should step in and invest in ‘saving’ nuclear arms control, or continue with the current agenda. Part of the dilemma is also the extent to which they may need to adjust their deterrence and defence postures in response to the deeper security crisis, including perhaps by creating a ‘European’ nuclear deterrent. Another challenge is the existing division within Europe between states that support nuclear disarmament in line with the approach taken by the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition

of Nuclear Weapons and those that prefer a step-by-step approach to nuclear disarmament that relies, in part, on a continuation of US and Russian nuclear reductions based on arms control treaties.

### **WHERE DO EUROPEAN STATES GO FROM HERE**

The crisis in the existing model of bilateral nuclear arms control presents European states with a dilemma. They cannot disregard these developments because European security is being negatively affected. At the same time, even if they wanted to actively engage in nuclear arms control, the room for manoeuvre would be limited and the opportunities for increasing European agency on nuclear arms control issues are far from obvious. Of the scenarios listed above, only the development of a new strategic arms control agenda would seem to create space for new actors, including European actors, to co-shape the system. In all other scenarios, the USA and Russia continue to play the central role. The basic weakness is the place of Europe in the global nuclear order. In some areas of and discussions on arms control, such as conventional weapons, cyberspace and outer space, European states already possess or are developing significant capabilities, and can therefore be active participants. In the nuclear field, however, their relevance is considerably smaller. The USA and Russia, as possessors of nuclear arsenals qualitatively and quantitatively greater than the two European arsenals, and as the countries that invented and pursued traditional nuclear arms control, remain the main players. China is not engaged, but is seen as an increasingly important actor. Europe's importance and impact are viewed as limited. The EU has thus far played no role in nuclear arms control negotiations. Its legal prerogatives for engaging in the topic would need to be clarified, its strategy agreed and its diplomatic capacity developed almost from scratch.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The crisis in nuclear arms control will continue to pose challenges for European security. The ability of European states to affect US and Russian decision making remains limited, and the scenario of developing an independent and effective EU approach to nuclear arms policy appears unrealistic. Beyond pleas to both sides to continue with their arms control processes, at this stage the EU can make a threefold meaningful and realistic contribution. First, EU member states can develop and share among their partner's ideas about the future of strategic arms control and ways to reduce the role of nuclear weapons globally, starting with the nuclear risk reduction agenda. Second, the EU and its member states can take the

lead in developing solutions to some specific nonnuclear arms control challenges, such as a ban on lethal autonomous weapon systems, and the promotion of arms control in space and mechanisms for countering missile proliferation. Finally, the EU member states should at least be open to internal discussions about the best ways to incentivize, or put pressure on, Russia and the USA to precede with the nuclear arms control agenda, beginning with a New START extension.

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